

SERMON TEXT FOR TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD, YEAR A
PREACHED FEBRUARY 26, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA
TEXTS: Matthew 17.1-19, Exodus 24.12-18, Psalm 99, 2 Peter 1.16-21

CHANGE. Hardly anyone likes to **hear** this word – let alone be the **victim** of it. Most of us **despise, resist,** even **fear** change. But change is **inevitable.** And we often forget that change can actually be a **good** thing!

Change is what we are doing today at Zion! We are changing **hymnals.** The familiar, well-worn **green** ones are being replaced by a new one with a **cranberry** cover. (We call it cranberry rather than red because a long-ago hymnal from the 1950's and 1960's - the one many of us grew up with - had a red cover.)

So change is not all **bad,** right? It just takes some **getting used to,** that's all. It requires us to shift our **thinking** just a bit, to allow ourselves to be **unfamiliar** and a bit **uncomfortable** for a period of time – maybe even a **long** time. But eventually the thing that had changed will become as comfortable and familiar as the thing **before** it – and maybe it will even make things **better!** Certainly that's what we hope for with every **political election,** right?

Now, I'm not sure that a **new hymnal** in our pew racks is going to make **that** much difference to our worship life here at Zion. In all honesty, we've been using it – both its liturgies and its hymns – without you knowing it for these last ten years. But there are things in this hymnal that Suzanne and I have yet to **uncover,** so I hope that you will be open to our little bit of **experimentation** as we all become more familiar with its contents and grow to **appreciate** it as we have our previous ones.

Well, enough about a hymnal. The reason I talk about change is because **Jesus** goes through a bit of **change,** of **transformation,** himself as he goes up the mountain with three of his disciples. At this point, Jesus' ministry is almost **complete.** And **now,** it seems, it is time to prepare for the final events – to head to Jerusalem, and to the suffering he would endure for the sake of the world.

There on the mountain, with Peter and James and John as witnesses, Jesus is **touched by the presence of God.** As Matthew records, *"his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white."* And then we hear the **voice** from the cloud, echoing the same words heard at Jesus' **baptism:** *"This is my son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"* This is a message both to **Jesus** – reminding him of his Father's love and support – and a message to the **disciples** for all time: *"listen to him!"*

While an awful lot of this event is **unfathomable** and **inexplicable,** one thing becomes clear: **change is afoot.** Even though Peter tries, Jesus tells him

that they cannot **stay** on the mountain, **reveling** in this great thing that has occurred. **And**, Jesus warns them not to **share** this with anyone. They simply aren't ready to grasp the **enormity** of the situation or its true **meaning** – not until after the resurrection.

So Jesus and the disciples are at a **turning point**, the time when Jesus – confessed as **Messiah**, revealed **in glory** – now turns steadfastly toward **Jerusalem** to offer a **different picture** of Messiah and glory than anyone then – or now – expected.

At its core, the Transfiguration insists that change is **difficult** but **needed**. Change demands **reorientation**. And sometimes, change happens before our reorientation is **complete**, before the new perspective is adequately in place. I suspect that **Peter**, there on the mountain with Jesus, is **caught** in that **suspension**: between wanting things to stay the same and knowing that change is afoot.

It's not that we, like Peter, haven't **seen** change coming. It's not that we haven't recognized what the change might **look** like. We just wonder if we are **ready**, if we can we **handle** it, if we are **prepared**. We try to **hold on** as tightly as we can to keep the change from **occurring** – as if we could hold back time. Whether it's seeing our **children** heading off to college, watching our parents or spouse's slow departure to **death**, or feeling like an **outsider** as our society moves in a direction we never **expected**, we put up **walls** or blockades to try and keep the **new thing** from taking place or having it **affect** us. But these are only **temporary**. Like Jesus and the disciples, we, too, must go down the mountain, back to reality – the new, **changed** reality.

Change, by definition, is a simultaneous **holding on** of what was and a **looking toward** the hope of what can be. And that's why it is rather **excruciating**. Change insists that you exist in a place you don't want to be. Change demands that you abide in a space of **yet-to-be resolution**. Change creates a sense of **grief** over **what was** and yet **excitement** for what is to **come**.

Whether Jesus was **ready** for it or not, change was about to affect his life and his ministry. He knew it was **inevitable**. Like us in similar situations, Jesus had a million reasons to walk away, to walk in the opposite direction, to stay on the mountain. He knew what was going to **happen** to him, and he wasn't **ready**. He **argued** with God that night in the Garden as he prayed: "Don't let this **happen** to me. But if it must, then **your will** be done."

Change isn't all bad. Change can bring about **good** things, right? And maybe, just maybe – in the midst of the confusion and uncertainty of change – well, that's exactly where we **need** to be, because **God is right there with us**.
AMEN